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PROLONGING LIFE AND DEVELOPING PERSONAL POWERS

BY J. PEASE NORTON,

West Haven, Conn.

To promote social progress should be the aim of *constructive* economics—if we may be permitted to use this phrase to distinguish our subjects from those of *theoretical* economics. We deal with cost of production of wealth and with cost of production of labor. We are interested in understanding the elusive conception of the standard of living of our people. We are interested in the meaning of human life—its length of days, its breadth and its depth. All fields of science we draw upon in estimating, measuring and considering how social progress may be promoted.

Sumner's Conception of Social Progress

That eminent economist and profound thinker, Prof. William Graham Sumner, once remarked to the writer that he had come to look upon theoretical economics as a bankrupt science. On account of this conviction, Professor Sumner broadened his studies during the later years of his life, to include ethnology and anthropology, believing that a much wider array of facts were needed to justify even tentative conclusions in the social sciences. His conception of social progress was the product of years of research in many fields and it is with great respect that I am led to adopt his conception as the most rational one which has come to my attention. Professor Sumner held that social progress should be measured by the degree of control over the environment exercised by a social group at a given time and place. No other criterion—and he had tested many—permitted the conclusion that social progress had occurred. He saw successive eras of civilization ended abruptly by violent wars. He saw in history how devastation and desolation regularly followed civilization and prosperity.

Early Distinctions Between Ophelimity and Usefulness

Pareto refers in his writings to the distinction between utility and usefulness, and sharply to distinguish the meanings, he coined

the word "ophelimity" as equivalent to desirability without regard to the point whether the object desired was useful for continuing the existence of the individual. Professor Sumner had in mind in his conception of social progress, usefulness, rather than ophelimity. Theoretical economics have developed through the complications of the conceptions of *ophelimity* and wealth—the latter defined as material possessions having *ophelimity*.

Since men desire all manner of things which are not useful for continuing their existence, some of which are positively destructive, what generalizations of theoretical economics are applicable to a policy of constructive social progress? The slogans of *laissez-faire* derived from the writings of the early economists in regard to commerce emphasized the desirability of complete freedom from legislative interference. The purpose of legislative interference is theoretically—and often practically—to promote social progress.

Of What Does Social Progress Consist?

Sumner was wont to classify the acts of individuals into two grand divisions, probably fundamental: self-maintenance and self-perpetuation. Now the life of the individual consists of a series of acts which are capable of classification. Let us call this the breadth of life. It is interesting to maintain for several weeks a fifteen minute record, allotting one minute every fifteen minutes to writing down just what has occupied the individual during the preceding fourteen minutes. Such records show that weekly averages of the time record are very much alike. The number of hours devoted to various pursuits show how closely the individual is limited by nature, by position, and by environment. Most people devote two-thirds of their time record to sleep and to self-maintenance. These hours are occupied in performing a series of acts which are directly or indirectly ways of controlling the environment. They largely comprise acts which are in nature applications of the useful arts to the problems of self-maintenance. Thus Professor Sumner's conception of social progress includes the advances in the useful arts. In fact we may define the arts as man's "useful immaterial possessions"—useful in the sense of tending toward self-maintenance. These useful immaterial possessions keep the race alive. Some of them are rational and consciously understood—many of them are empirically practiced. If we divide the environ-

ment of an individual into two classes, the material environment as distinguished from the social environment, these useful immaterial possessions comprise two classes, the useful arts and the *mores*.

Professor Sumner's death occurred before the completion of several proposed publications, but not before the initial work upon the *mores*.

Useful Arts

By consulting the ordinary library index we find that the useful arts are mentioned and classified by the catalogues. Thus, in the quest for food under self-maintenance we have agriculture, domestication of plants, hunting, fishing; in the quest for warmth and shelter, we have architecture, building materials, clothing; in the quest for continuance of life we have sanitation, hygiene; and these all are sub-divided into hundreds of classifications. By no means unimportant are transportation, exchange, and the dissemination of intelligence; the latter sub-divided into writing, printing, education, libraries, telegraph, telephone, etc. Then, too, we find the arts of government, of war, etc.—ways of controlling the social environment. Historically the arts are intimately associated with the *mores* and a slow evolution has separated rather painfully some of the chaff from the wheat.

But these useful arts, imperfect as they are, these immaterial possessions, are capable of description, classification and inventory. When put into practice they create wealth. Given the raw materials, the man and the art, wealth may be created. The efficiency of an art in a given classification for accomplishing an operation is capable of measurement relatively to another art in the same group in time saved per unit of product. Further, for a given population, the value of an art is readily capitalized in wealth value; and wages, interest and profits, economic quantities, may be created by the application of the arts. New arts are invented by the brain of man; hence the signal importance of the conservation or, better, the development of our human resources. No clear idea of the history of the race is possible without some conception of social progress. The history of the useful arts should be written for the children. The heroes of the school should be those who discovered fire, steam, electricity, the telephone, agricultural machinery, and not the leaders of the civil wars which are forever retarding the inherent forces of social progress.

Inherent Forces for Social Progress

Elsewhere, I have suggested that the inherent forces for social progress reside in the frequency curve of exceptionality. Let us call this the depth of life. The use of frequency curves is more common in other sciences than in our own group. We are all familiar with the notion of skew curves of frequency and the median division. For illustration, a thousand and one soldiers standing in line in order of height would descend from giants to dwarfs. Rearranged by the character of height, we have a frequency curve of a group of men with respect to the physical character of height. These skew curves are convenient ways to present groups of facts and these simple constants may have some value in making our statements more precise. The important character in social progress is exceptionality; not physical but mental. We must leave to experimental psychology, for the present, the important problem of measuring potential exceptionality in the population. From researches already made by the Pearsonian investigators, we may assume as a first approximation that the frequency curve of exceptionality is a skew curve. For the present discussion, we may consider the group arranged by the character of exceptionality, ranging from the mental giants to the mental dwarfs or idiots. By exceptionality, we mean a combined index-number of the characters which favor successful application of the useful arts and capacity to improve or to add to the world's stock of useful truth. In brief such an index should be a coefficient of relative efficiency. An Edison may occur once in one million of population, possibly once in one hundred million. One invention may net, after all costs of production are met, one hour per day for all users of the invention over methods previously used. Suppose the sewing machine saves for each owner ten dollars per year. For a population of 100,000 users, the annual savings would be \$1,000,000; for 100,000,000, \$1,000,000,000. If half goes to the consumer and half to the inventor for seventeen years or more, the consumer is certainly guilty of appropriating an unearned increment. We all are beneficiaries of this enormous unearned increment, which has been handed down and which is being added to hourly.

The Cause of Social Progress

In a population of 100,000 with one inventor of grade A, whose discovery in a lifetime may result in an annual saving of \$1 per capita net, we have an increment in social income of \$100,000 through one man. If, now, we double the population and reason that in twice the population we have two inventors of grade A, we then have the increment in social income not twice \$100,000, but four times \$100,000. In other words, as a first approximation we may reason that the per capita increment in social income increases in proportion to the population, a conclusion which is pretty much at variance with the Malthusian theory of population, but which is in accord nevertheless with the steady growth of population and the increased standards of living. Further, the increment in social income from the work of the exceptional man increases as the square of the population. Finally the capitalized value of the work of exceptional men increases as the square of population, and, lastly, the life earnings of exceptional men should steadily increase with the population. The central problem in a constructive policy for social progress is the intensive development of the exceptional portion of the population. In such a program the whole people are interested. If one half the population is exceptional in comparison with the other half, the less exceptional half will produce nearly as many exceptional children as the exceptional half. In such a program, no class is left out. Those less successful today might have been the more successful had opportunity come earlier and had minor pitfalls been properly guarded by society. We may think of social progress as inherent in an increasing population, but the friction or resistance caused by the wastes of nations is at times intense. To limit by legislation *multiple initiative* is most unfortunate. Nations may go to great lengths with profit to promote *multiple initiative* which spells opportunity for the men who *can*.

Most Important Wastes of Nations

The three foremost wastes of nations are preventable war, preventable ignorance, and preventable life waste. The waste from failure to develop intensively the potential exceptionality of the population is the industrial opportunity of the hour to remedy. The importance of the technological museum and industrial and

vocational training are obvious. We should look forward to the day when a technological museum shall exist in every social center.

Is it not advisable that every individual should be taught two different self-sustaining trades selected by him from a wide variety? This would greatly assist in making labor more mobile. The writer has urged that federal aid to industrial education should be given through the agency of the army, lining up the necessity of defense with the development of exceptionality. A two-year enlistment of 200,000 young men annually, chosen for exceptionality and stationed near colleges, universities and technical schools, would bring the opportunity for industrial and technical education to large numbers and incidentally build up a magnificent army reserve of trained and efficient men. In the development of our natural resources, in the development of our human resources, nothing is more important than fitting children to earn large incomes in later life—through which sanitary surroundings may be purchased in later years—and at the same time inculcating sanitary and hygienic standards. It is important to know sanitary and hygienic standards and it is equally important to have the income to sustain the higher standards in the practice. Ignorance in regard to hygienic and sanitary standards is prevalent among all classes. This field of self-maintenance which involves the arts of wise living requires a series of investigations and widespread demonstration of results. Consider the wealth of the field; the usefulness of foods; the site of the habitat; the design of the house; chairs for correct posture; ventilation, heating, water supply, lighting, plumbing, exercise, recreation, efficiency at work, sanitary conditions of the factory, hours of labor, thrift. The field is as broad as life itself.

In 1906 the writer discussed the advisability of adding to the number of the secretaries of the President's cabinet a new secretaryship which should have to do with the conservation of human resources.¹ It is with satisfaction that we note the growing importance of the new secretaryship of labor. Those who have labored loyally to create such an office in our government are to be congratulated upon the first great step achieved. It was Mr. Bryan who suggested that the title of such a department should be labor, rather than health. Human life is now represented in the cabinet.

¹ "The Importance of a National Department of Health," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1907.

The secretary of labor is charged with the duty of fostering, improving and developing the welfare of the wage-earners of the United States. Further, the secretary of labor is also given authority and directed to report to Congress a "plan of coördination of the powers of the secretary of labor with the powers of present bureaus, commissions and departments, so far as they relate to the welfare of labor in order to unify such activities and with a view to further legislation."

To recall to your minds a summary which the writer prepared after corresponding with a large number of sanitary experts, outlining a possible organization of such a department, it is interesting to note just what has been accomplished. We have a new secretaryship of labor which is the first great step accomplished. In the movement for a national department of health (or labor) which had the support of many organizations, the bureaus proposed in 1907-1909 follow:

- Infant Hygiene
- Education
- Sanitation
- Pure Food
- Registration of Physicians
- Registration of the Drug Industry
- Institutions of Relief
- Organic Diseases
- Quarantine
- Health Information
- Immigration
- Old Age Pensions
- Labor Conditions
- Research requiring Statistics
- Research requiring Laboratories

It was then proposed to transfer existing bureaus to a new department and to create new ones. The first great steps were to secure the new department and a secretaryship in the executive cabinet.

Already the new department of labor assumes the form which was discussed in 1907. Much, of course, remains to be done, but what many predicted was impossible, namely, the addition of a new secretary to the President's cabinet to represent life, labor and health, has now come to pass, in spite of a considerable opposition.

We no longer discuss theories but facts. What President Roosevelt said was inadvisable and what most men said was impossible to accomplish has now been done. Our gratitude goes out to President Taft for not vetoing the bill. We no longer discuss an idealistic scheme. We simply point out the few remaining steps necessary to put into operation a constructive policy of social progress.

The department of labor now includes the following bureaus:

Children's Bureau
Immigration
Naturalization
Labor Statistics

Immediate Need of This Department

The immediate needs of the department of labor are first, larger appropriations, and second, transfer of certain bureaus now in other departments to the department of labor, notably the public health service now in the treasury department and the food inspection service now in the department of agriculture. New bureaus should be added, and present bureaus should be enlarged.

The bureaus which it now seems might be transferred advantageously to the department of labor follow:

Life-saving service from the treasury department.
Bureau of public health from the treasury department.
Bureau of pensions from the department of the interior.
Bureau of education from the department of the interior.

Meat inspection service of the bureau of animal industry, department of agriculture.

Bureau of chemistry, foods, drugs, etc., department of agriculture.

Population and vital statistics from bureau of census, department of commerce.

A board of national defense consisting of the secretaries of labor, commerce, army and navy might advantageously link up the activities of each department in certain ways. The natural alliance of the army and navy to industrial training has been mentioned. The army is the means through which our young men should be given an equal opportunity to acquire technological knowledge. Receiving his sustenance in return for his work as a

soldier, an equal opportunity would be offered to every young man, however poor, to acquire knowledge of use to him in later life in raising his earning power. Such education should be pursued under the direction of the bureau of education of the department of labor. There is a further relation between commerce and higher labor standards which is vital. There are certain obstacles which must be overcome. To enforce sanitary standards necessary for health upon manufacturing and other industries adds to the cost of production in many cases. This injures not only our foreign trade but also the home market. Not only can foreign nations operating under a lower cost of production through neglect of sanitary standards take away our foreign trade, but they may close down our industries at home through importation of cheaper foreign goods. A bureau in the department of commerce should check up cost of production in this country and in foreign countries. A bureau in the department of labor should check up sanitary standards in the home industry and in the industry abroad. Tariff duties should be levied compensating the home industries for the increased cost of production caused by higher sanitary standards.

Positive Program

We now have the elements of a strong department capable of lengthening, broadening and deepening human life in the United States.

The victory is more than half won. We have a broad-minded, far-seeing man in the cabinet whose devotion to the interests of human life is well known. The natural-growth force behind a cabinet officer is in our favor. The possibilities for a constructive program of social progress lies in the new department of labor. This new department represents our national vitality because this department stands for the welfare of labor and in the United States we are all laborers, not only in the sense of laboring for self-maintenance but also as laborers together for the common good. It is with great satisfaction that I include the following letter from the Hon. William B. Wilson, secretary of the United States department of labor.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON

January 4, 1915.

DR. J. PLEASE NORTON,
No. 460 Ocean Avenue,
West Haven, Conn.

My dear Dr. Norton:

I am in receipt of your favor of the 23rd instant, and have not found time until now to make response.

There are many things which the department of labor needs, and which we hope in time it will receive, in order to make its work as effective as it should be. Immediately preceding the French Revolution, Turgot, the great French reformer, put into the mouth of Louis XVI of France the following statement:

"God, when he made man with wants, and rendered labour an indispensable resource, made the right of work the property of every individual in the world, and this property is the first, the most sacred, and the most imprescriptible of all kinds of property. We regard it as one of our first duties, an act worthy of all benevolence, to free our subjects from every infraction of that inalienable right of humanity."

We have not yet reached the point where we are prepared to put into practice the idea of Turgot that the "right of work is the property of every individual in the world." The time will undoubtedly come when the individual suffering an economic loss resulting from large numbers of idle men who are willing to work, will be overcome by the development of practical methods which may be applied in such cases. To do this will mean not simply out-of-work insurance, but assurance of work. It will mean bringing the qualified man and the work together through a complete method of distribution in which municipal, state and federal branches of the Government will thoroughly coöperate. It will mean the handling of seasonal occupations in such a manner that seasonal laborers will be able to follow different occupations at different periods and in different places during the year. The Department of Labor should be furnished with means of working out these problems to a proper solution in all of their details.

The same is true with regard to safety, sanitation and hygiene, not only in places where laborers are employed but in the communities in which they reside and the homes in which they live.

The department should be given all of the means necessary for the promotion of industrial peace based upon industrial justice, not by compelling the employer to give wages, hours of labor, or conditions of employment contrary to his judgment, or compelling the workman to accept wages, hours of labor, or conditions of employment obnoxious to him, but by the process of bringing into the minds of each a better understanding of their rights and obligations to each other and to society.

I have briefly outlined but a few of the needs of the department. As I stated in the beginning, I do not expect that these things will all be supplied immediately,

but I sincerely hope that the development of public sentiment will ultimately place in the hands of the Department the necessary means for the successful working out of these vast problems.

Respectfully yours,
W. B. WILSON,
Secretary.

The industrial opportunity of the hour lies in the intensive development of our people. The agency is now at hand, the United States department of labor. What the department of agriculture has done for animals and plants, let the department of labor do for mankind. *Constructive economics* suggest the lines of effort, first, to give the opportunity to the young to learn how to do things which in later life will increase their incomes, and to discover what is best to do with the increased income—after all knowledge of the problems of the *depth* of life.

Second—to give the opportunity for those who want work to find work, to remove the narrow conceptions which permit child labor, wages below a minimum standard of living, and to ameliorate the evils of life by old age pensions, compensation for accidents, etc. There are problems of the *breadth* of life.

Third—in the great field of *length of life*, much may be done and little has been attempted. Here, death and disease play havoc and the awful waste which goes on passes comprehension. The horrors of the European war are no more than a drop in the bucket in comparison with the blood tax of pneumonia and tuberculosis. All relative values are lost sight of in the political realm. Elections succeed elections fought over petty issues—the tariff, the money question, and the thread-bare issues of the past. Completely forgotten are the real vital issues which will bring dividends into every family—a larger earning power, a higher standard of living, and longer and healthier lives. These issues are the issues of tomorrow, and when we who labor, wake, a newer and a finer meaning will lie in those grand old words—the “rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”—words copied by the founders of our government into our fundamental documents,—words which they had snatched red-hot from the philosophy of the French revolution. Not by destruction, like those in Europe who cannot reason together, but by construction and by coöperation among all classes shall we successfully broaden, deepen and lengthen human life upon this earth,